

Speeches from the graduation ceremony of the Online Activism Institute's Civic Activism Program

Shireen Yacoub's Graduation Address



My name is Shireen Yacoub; I am a lawyer and an activist in the field of human rights, as well as a member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights and many other associations that work on spreading awareness of women's issues.

At the start when I applied to join the workshop in the spring, I thought the training would be traditional, like any other workshop, and that the trainers would be the same as any other trainers – that once we finished the workshop and get our certificates, our relationship would end. But the Online Activism Institute and its trainers proved me wrong, as they were with us even after the workshop and mentorship finished.

This training had a great effect on my life. Before, I had goals, plans, and visions; [but] they were all just thoughts. I knew achieving them would take a lot of time, but with Karen and Samer's help, I was able to translate these thoughts into reality.

Through my work as a lawyer, I noticed that a lot of women, even highly-educated ones, don't know about the simplest of their rights. So my activism plan called for starting a legal aid unit to help women get their rights in Jordanian courts in accordance with international agreements, in addition to offering social and psychological help to women in need of it.

The goal of the training was change, and this change really happened with me. After the training and with Samer and Karen's help, I conducted field studies and did strategies to translate my plan into reality. Now I am in the process of establishing a center to offer legal help and information about human rights. You will be invited to the opening shortly. Through the OAI, I've also met a number of activists who have been very supportive of my ideas and my cause.

Finally, I'd like to thank the OAI for giving us this opportunity to create the change we want to achieve. I'd especially like to thank Samer and Karen, who have been a source of inspiration and help to me the whole time.

Mirvat Awamleh's Graduation Address (as written by the participant)
Participant in the George Washington University leadership course



Dear participants, mentors and coordinators,

I am so very pleased today, as it is my honor to speak on behalf of all the fine ladies who participated in the Political Leadership Course.

This rich opportunity or journey we have shared and lived together has given us more insights about who we are, where we are, where we are heading, and what we have to do - in order to mark a change in our environment, society or working atmosphere. In fact, this is the core of the two-month course we had. Its aim was to help us better recognize our potentials

which make us viable and effective female members in our society. We have learnt how to live through the eyes of others, how to appreciate differences, how to spot and identify our points of strength and weakness. All of this was taught to us, so as to grow and become effective leaders who enjoy distinctive and remarkable qualities.

We are indeed so very proud of the knowledge we have obtained, be it political, social, environmental, commercial, or educational. This course has helped us draw or envision our future road map, which will be our holy personal account and record to become leaders who are able to create a stark change.

We are now more aware and confident of our potentials, our hidden or misled potentials that dwell inside each one of us, around us and out of our system. We are now able to walk the talk, and able to cherish what "we" together can do and change, and not what "I" alone can create. This understanding of the concept of leadership and change is our driving force to become the tool of a feasible change.

To wrap up, our pursued desire of change or leadership will remain something dreamable, unless we all translated this dream into a reachable action or plan. By doing so, our notions, ideas and hypotheses will be liberated, cherished, and our pursued goals will come true. Thus, I believe that it is now the right time, after each one of us has been equipped with the sufficient knowledge and motivations, to best use the energy she has within and it is the time to break the chains that might strain her creativity and block her away from the desired change she yearns to create.

With this I end my speech, and I wish every participant the best of luck!
Thank you all, and may God bless you.

Zina Alami's graduation address (as written by the participant)

Participant in the "Create Your Activism Plan" workshop, George Washington University leadership course, and "Sharpen Your Political and Campaign Skills" mentorship with Karen Johnson



Good morning. My name is Zina Alami and I am a university teaching fellow.

While reading a daily Jordanian newspaper, by the end of the previous year, I was attracted to an eye-catching advertisement with the title: "A call for ladies who are interested in public work." I knew that I am interested in that because I want to help my society and to fulfill my self esteem in doing so. After contacting the Interaction Forum, I became even more interested in joining the program, as I always sought to use my abilities, talents and passions to develop my community. I have always been looking for a program which can help me use my leadership traits effectively.

Even though I neither had any written plan nor a clear aim, but what I knew properly was that I want to develop my community. I assumed "correctly" that this is the program that I have been always seeking. This is indeed the program that will help me start on my journey by improving my political abilities and developing my personal and leadership skills. I want to become an effective leader in my society and reach out to the people, to talk to them and attempt to reform some negative phenomena in our community.

The first workshop, "Creating Your Activism Plan," introduced and helped me to create my personal activism plan. It also assisted me in setting my goals and objectives, understanding my civic environment and learning to develop effective messages. Because I make living by working as a University teaching fellow, I know well and have a passion that we need to reform education in our beloved country that is why my activism plan was/is about education and its reforming.

Later on, I was really lucky that I enrolled in the second program; the leadership course offered by The George Washington University. Our mentor was Professor Kathleen Schafer. This course introduced me to my leadership style and my personality traits. After the course I could determine my positive traits and my points of weaknesses. I also could know the leadership styles and personalities of others. It was an important course that I benefited from to refine my activism plan, and to make new relations that helped me during my next steps.

After I participated in the previous two workshops, I had the opportunity to get a one-to-one mentoring and coaching course. The course title was “Sharpen your political and campaign skills”. My Mentor was Ms. Karen Johnson. Dealing with Karen gave me an opportunity to ask her advice about how to manage my campaign. She offered practical suggestions about how to best implement my strategies. The program assisted me in identifying what really needs to be changed. I consider the one-to-one mentoring course as the course that worked on evoking the enthusiasm inside me. I got more motivated and energized. Ms. Karen helped me write a more specific detailed leadership plan. Because Ms. Johnson and Mr Samer Libdeh, helped me accessing what is really needed in the society. Ms Karen also contacted many concerned American organizations, to seek support and suggestions.

After the mentorship, I started thinking in a different way; I wanted to start a project that was not started in our country. Education is a very fertile field that has many sections. So I decided that I will concentrate on education from the first beginning; from the pre-schools and the kindergartens (KG). In Jordan the nurseries, the KGs and the pre-schools are not well supervised, this field is somehow ignored and forgotten. Parents and the community do really need to know what our kids are doing for more than 8 hours a day. Curricula have to be well studied, teachers have to get excellent training. The schools have to have excellent physical structures. This age (under 6 years old) is a very critical age and these years are the most important years in an individual's life. These are the years of creating the personality and shaping the character. Accordingly, and as a start, I thought that neither a company nor a corporate can help me. I am thinking about establishing an NGO. An NGO that is concerned with: education in pre- schools, the issues of nurseries and pre-schools, the health of the kids “physically and psychologically”, the curricula that are taught in the pre-schools and many other related subjects.

My dream is to rise up *all* of the Jordanian kids in healthy environments in model pre-schools.

Thank you for good listening.